

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ARAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

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EUR-12 COME-00 TRSE-00 /120 W
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FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8765

INFO AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 PORT OF SPAIN 0289

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROGERS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TD, US

SUBJECT: CURRENT TRINIDADIAN PRECEPTION OF THE UNITED STATES

REF: STATE 010605

1. PRECEPTIONS OF THE U.S. IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO ARE FAR FROM UNIFORM, AND DISTINCTIVE DIFFERENCES MAY BE PRECEIVED ACROSS SUCH PRINCIPAL SPECTRA AS AMOUNT OF EDUCATION, AGE, AND ECONOMIC STATUS. OUR COMMON ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND GEOGRAPHICAL PROXIMITY, HOWEVER, LEAD TO A VERY HIGH DEGREE OF EXPOSURE IN LOCAL MEDIA OF THE INTERNAL U.S. POLITICAL DIALOGUE. HEADLINE STORIES IN MAJOR AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS GET QUICK REPLY HERE VIA AP, REUTERS, OR MAJOR FEATURE NEWS SERVICES. TIME MAGAZINE IS THE PREEMINENT WEEKLY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SOURCES FOR THE EDUCATED SEGMENT OF THE POPULATION. KNOWLEDGE OF AMERICAN REASSESSMENTS FOLLOWING THE VIETNAM WAR AND WATERGATE IS WIDESPREAD, BUT OFTEN REINTERPRETED THROUGH THE FILTER OF LOCAL

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EXPERIENCE OR PREJUDICE. SOMETIMES OUR EXPOSURE IS

PERHAPS SO EXCESSIVE THAT UNDERSTANDING IS ACTUALLY INHIBITED.

2. THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS ARE COLLECTIVE VIEWS OF COUNTRY TEAM AND ARE KEYED TO THE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS IN REFTTEL, ALTHOUGH TO SOME EXTEND ALL OTHER QUESTIONS ARE ANSWERS TO "A" AS WELL.

1. AMONG THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP, THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY, AND MOST OF THE PROFESSIONAL ESTABLISHMENT, THE EFFECT OF WATERGATE HAS BEEN MINIMAL. ESSENTIALLY, WE WON SOME NEW RESPECT FOR OUR FREE PRESS AND JUDICIARY AS WELL AS THE HIGH STANDARDS OF PUBLIC PROBITY AGAINST WHICH NIXON'S ACTIONS WERE JUDGED. THE VIETNAM WAR WAS NOT POPULAR HERE, BUT WAS AT BEST REMOTE AND OF LITTLE CONCERN. SUBSEQUENT EFFECTS OF THESE TWO EPISODES, HOWEVER, HAVE CAUSED CONCERN AND QUESTIONING. REPEATED INTELLIGENCE REVELATIONS AND THE COMPROMISE OF INTELLIGENCE SECRECY HAVE BROUGHT INCREASING PRIVATE EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN FROM RESPONSIBLE MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY WHO FEAR THAT TH U.S. MAY BE GOING TOO FAR IN TYING ITS HANDS AND REDUCING ITS ABILITY TO ACT. ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE EQUATION A SMALL BUT VOCAL LEFTIST INTELLECTUAL GROUP AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WEST INDIES (ST. AUGUSTINE CAMPUS) AS WELL AS SOME "PROGRESSIVE" TRADE UNION LEADERS HAVE CAPITALIZED ON PRESS REVELATIONS TO ALLEGE CLANDESTINE USG MANIPULATION EVERYWHERE FOR EVERY CONCEIVABLE PURPOSE. THIS ELEMENT TAKES JOY IN AMERICAN DISCOMFORT OR INHIBITIONS TO ACTION, BUT IS CLEARLY AT THIS TIME NOT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE MAJORITY OF THE SOCIETY HERE OR OF THE GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, ALLEGATIONS THAT THE U.S. IS AND WILL CONTINUE TO MEDDLE IN THE AFFAIRS OF TRINIDAD AND OTHER SMALL COUNTRIES ARE NOW FINDING A MORE CREDULOUS AUDIENCE.

B. THE OUTCOME IN VIETNAM HAD NO NOTICEABLE EFFECT ON THE T&T VIEW OF USG WILLINGNESS TO LIVE UP TO COMMITMENTS. WE WERE PERCEIVED AS HAVING FULLY MET ANY COMMITMENT THERE WHICH EXISTED. TRINIDAD HAS NOT BEEN

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ACTIVE IN STRATEGIC QUESTIONS AND HAS FELT LITTLE POTENTIAL THREAT OF THE KIND WHICH WOULD SENSITIZE IT TO POTENTIAL NEED FOR AN EFFECTIVE AND RELIABLE MILITARY ALLY. THERE WAS NO LOCAL EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM.

C. AND D. THE VISIBILITY OF CONGRESSIONAL CHECKS ON USG FREEDOM TO ACT ARE BECOMING MORE PRONOUNCED HERE.

THE OBVIOUS CONGRESSIONAL RESTRAINT ON EXECUTIVE ACTION IN ANGOLA AND PERCEIVED EMASCULATION OF THE CIA HAVE BEEN EVENTS WHICH HAVE BEGUN TO PRODUCE SOME NOTES OF LOCAL CONCERN WHICH WERE NOT SPOKEN BEFORE. CONGRESS IS SEEN AS THE PRINCIPAL FACTOR IN THIS REGARD. A YEAR EARLIER, CONGRESSIONAL EXCLUSION OF OPEC STATES FROM GSP BENEFITS OF THE TRADE ACT HIGHLIGHTED THE CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE RELATIONSHIP, BUT AT THAT TIME TRINIDADIANSTILL TENDED TO PRESUME THAT IF THE EXECUTIVE REALLY WANTED THE OPEC EXCLUSION REMOVED FROM THE LAW THAT THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED. ON THE WHOLE, THEY ARE LESS CERTAIN NOW. KNOWLEDGE OF OUR SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT IS WIDESPREAD, BUT REAL UNDERSTANDING IS FAR LESS SO SINCE ALL BUT THE BEST-INFORMED LOCAL OBSERVERS INEVITABLY PERCEIVE THE U.S. CONGRESS PARTLY THROUGH THE LENS OF LOCAL EXPERIENCE WITH A WESTMINISTER-TYPE PARLIAMENT AND STRICT MP SUBSERVIENT TO PARTY DISCIPLINE. WHILE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS ARE DRIVING HOME THE LESSON OF AMERICAN SEPARATION OF POWERS, THERE ARE SOME WHO WORRY THAT WE MAY LOSE OUR ABILITY TO ACT AS A RESULT OF THESE CONFLICTS.

E. AT THE LEVEL OF THOSE WHO ARE CURRENTLY RUNNING GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY, I DETECT NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN ATTITUDES TOWARD THE U.S. HOWEVER, AT A MORE BASIC LEVEL, SOME IMPORTANT AND LONG-RANGE CHANGES DO SEEM TO BE TAKING PLACE. NEGATIVE EVENTS AND INTERPRETATIONS HAVE GENERALLY DOMINATED THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE UNITED STATES FOR MORE THAN TWO YEARS NOW. THERE IS A GROWING KNEE-JERK TENDENCY TO ASSUME THAT THE DARK-SKINNED NATIONS OF THE "THIRD WORLD" ARE THE "WE," AND THAT THE INDUSTRIALIZED (MAINLY CAUCASIAN) NORTHERN SECRET

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HEMISPHERE (PREEMINENTLY THE USA) IS THE "THEY" ON ANY ISSUE. THE YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS (LARGELY UNLIKE THE LEADING MEMBERS OF SOCIETY OF THE OLDER GENERATION -- WHO WERE MOSTLY EDUCATED OVERSEAS AND INEVITABLY RETAIN A BROADER PERSPECTIVE ON THE WORLD) ARE COMING TO EQUATE CAPITALISM WITH EVIL, AND IN THEIR SEARCH FOR IDENTITY AND IN THEIR SUSCEPTIBILITY TO SLOGANS THEY ARE INCREASINGLY UNWILLING TO ACCEPT EITHER THE RATIONALE FOR OR THE MOTIVATIONS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO THE FUNCTIONING OF AN OPEN ECONOMIC SYSTEM. THUS, WHILE THE CURRENT DOMINANT ATTITUDES OF THE GENERATION IN POWER HAVE NOT BEEN AFFECTED GROSSLY, A GENERATIONAL SHIFT IS APPARENT AND THE MORE RECENTLY FORMED IMPRESSIONS OF THE U.S. ARE FAR MORE NEGATIVE. THIS SHIFT MAY BE A LONG-TERM ONE WHICH MAY NOT REVERSE FOR SOME TIME AND THE HIGH TIDE

OF WHICH WE ARE YET TO SEE.

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ACTION ARA-10

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EUR-12 COME-00 TRSE-00 /120 W
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FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 PORT OF SPAIN 0289

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROGERS

F. EXCEPT FOR SMALL BUT PREDICTABLE IDEOLOGICALLY-MOTIVATED GROUPS, THERE IS WIDESPREAD SATISFACTION IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO THAT THIS COUNTRY HAS NOT INVOLVED ITSELF IN THE CUBAN INTEVENTION IN ANGOLA BUT INSTEAD HAS DENIED CUBAN MILITARY LANDING AND REFUELING RIGHTS. THE SIZE AND SOPHISTICATION OF THE CUBAN INVOLVEMENT HAS NOT YET CAUSED MUCH COMMENT, BUT WE ARE BEGINNING TO DETECT SIGNS THAT QUESTIONS ARE BEING RAISED AS TO WHAT THE IMPLICATIONS OF CUBAN ADVENTURISM ARE FOR THE CARIBBEAN. THUS FAR THERE HAS BEEN NO SIGNIFICANT CONCERN ABOUT USG INVOLVEMENT IN THE SITUATION. SOUTH AFRICAN INVOLVEMENT HIT AN EMOTIONAL NERVE, HOWEVER, AND ERODED ACCEPTANCE OF THE U.S. POSITION. AS OUR INABILITY TO FOLLOW THROUGH BECOMES MORE APPARENT AND AS EVENTS APPEAR TO MAKE IT LOOK AS IF WE HAVE EITHER BACKED A LOSER OR SIMPLY BEEN UNABLE TO COUNTER SOVIET/CUBAN ACTIONS, BOTH DISQUIET AND GLOATING ARE EVIDENT, DEPENDING UPON

THE POLITICS OF THE INDIVIDUAL CONCERNED. DISQUIET IS
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THE DOMINANT MOOD. TRINIDADIAN FIND IT SOMEWHAT UNCOMFORTABLE TO LIVE SO CLOSE TO A GIANT, BUT EVEN MORE DISTURBING IF IT PROVES TO BE A FECKLESS GIANT WHEN THERE ARE OBVIOUSLY PREDATORS AROUND.

G. THE GOTT IS FIRMLY CONVINCED OF THE VALUE OF DEALING WITH THE USG COLLECTIVELY IF POSSIBLE. AS A VERY SMALL STATE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FEELS THE IMPORTANCE OF BANDING TOGETHER WITH LIKE-MINDED STATES TO ACT IN UNISON WHEN FACING THE COLOSSI. THE PREEMINENTLY PREFERRED GROUPING THROUGH WHICH THE GOTT WOULD ACT IS THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM). SECONDARILY, ECLA AND THE GROUP OF 77 ARE SEEN AS IMPORTANT AND USEFUL ON THE WIDER SCENE. THUS FAR, DEPENDENCE UPON THE OAS HAS BEEN MINIMAL, FOR THAT ORGANIZATION IS VIEWED AS DOMINATED BY THE LATIN STATES WITH THEIR DIFFERING HERITAGE, MODUS OPERANDI, AND PROBLEMS.

H. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF ANY CHANGE IN GOTT VOTING PATTERNS IN THE UN OR OTHER INTERNATIONAL FORA.

I. SIMPLY AS A MEANS OF REDUCING THE OVERWHELMING DOMINANCE OF THE U.S. AND A FEW EUROPEAN STATES IN THE TRINIDADIAN ECONOMY, THE GOTT HAS SEARCHED FOR EXPANDED ECONOMIC LINKS WITH CHINA, EASTERN EUROPE AND THE THIRD WORLD. EXCEPT FOR SOME INCREASING ECONOMIC LINKS WITH JAPAN, THESE OVERTURES HAVE NOT BORNE SIGNIFICANT FRUIT, HOWEVER, AND NO SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES FOR THE U.S. ARE FORESEEN. TRADITIONAL ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIPS ARE LIKELY TO CONTINUE FOR SOME TIME WITH THE EXCEPTION THAT WHOLLY FOREIGN-OWNED ENTERPRISES WILL BE REQUIRED TO CONVERT AT LEAST TO JOINT-VENTURE ARRANGEMENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT LOCAL PARTICIPATION.

J. THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE UNGA WAS A HIGHLY POSITIVE TURNING POINT WHICH AT LEAST PARTIALLY PERSUADED THE GOTT THAT THE USG WAS CONCERNED WITH THE NEEDS OF THE DEVELOPING NATIONS. THIS WAS DEFINITELY VIEWED AS A SHIFT TOWARD ACCOMMODATION. THE RELATIVELY LITTLE BENEFIT ACCURING TO TRINIDAD THUS FAR, HOWEVER, LEAVES AMPLE ROOM FOR THE SKEPTICS
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AND THOSE POLITICIANS IN OPPOSITION TO BELITTLE THE
VALUE OF COOPERATION WITH THE USG.
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